

Montevideo

Jorge Caraballo, Haroldo González, Clemente Padín, Teresa Vila

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Jorge Caraballo. IBM, 1984. Xerography on paper. 45 x 30 cm

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In Uruguay, in the historical period between the second government of Luis Batlle Berres (1955-1959) and the start of the civil-military dictatorship in 1973, a crisis befell "classical Uruguay." That is to say, the mythical traits that defined Uruguayan society as subdued, hyperintegrated, party-dominated, and precariously prosperous, underwent a shakeup that deeply blurred the boundaries of the country's economic, political and social relations.

In Montevideo's cultural scene there took place a deep questioning of artistic practices, and also of the social task of the creator. The artist in his activities should escape from the traditional forms of production, presentation and circulation, taking on commitments that would connect him with the social and political reality currently being lived and, at the same time, should reach the largest public possible.

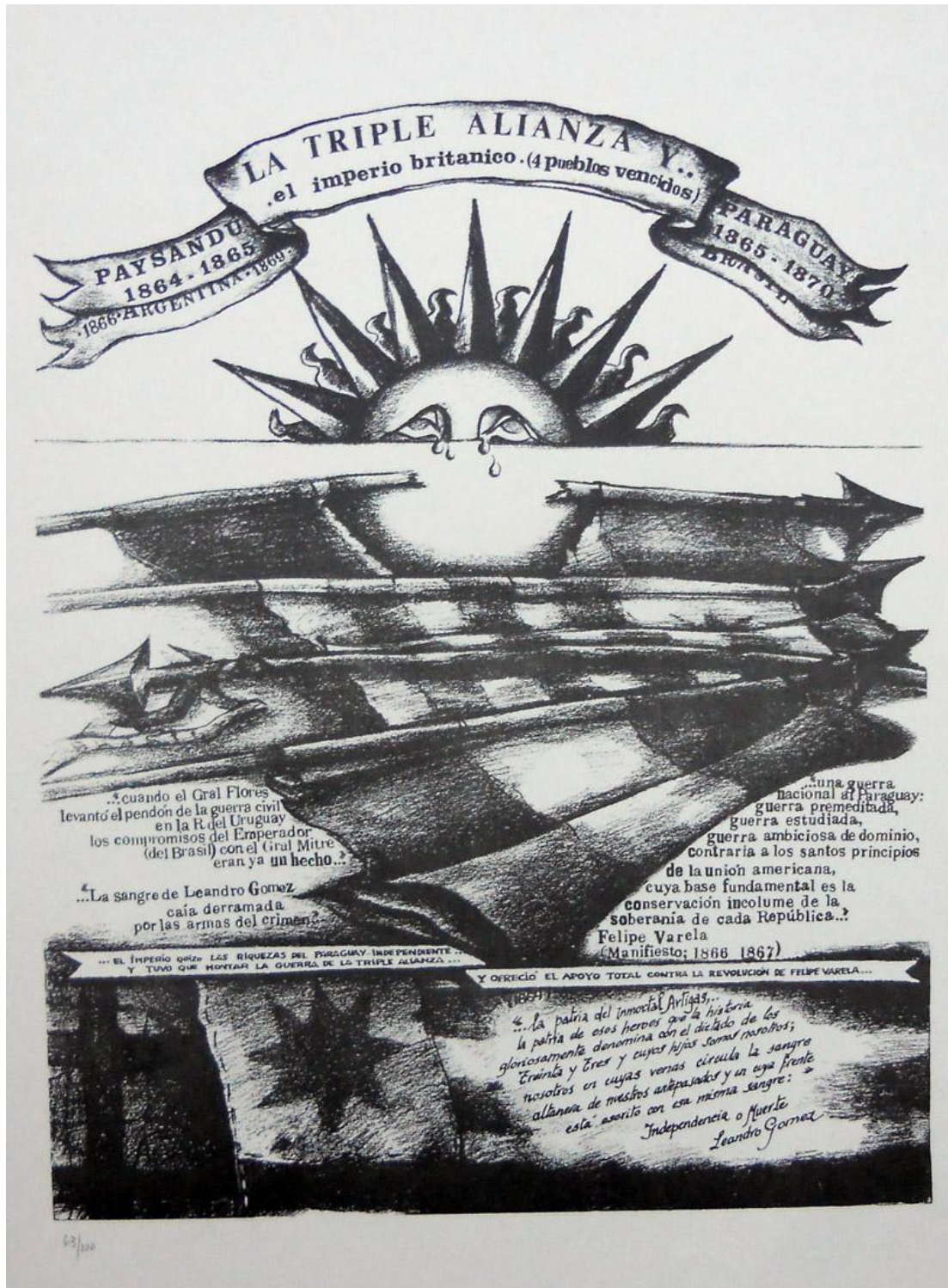
Thus, into the context of the visual arts -- permeable to international circulation of information -- there came an extreme receptivity to the milieu of the independent theater, experimental poetry, the written printed press, and artisanal production.

In the second half of the 1960s, four artists stand out both for their radicality and for their singular careers: Jorge Caraballo (1941-2014), Haroldo González (1941), Clemente Padín (1939), and Teresa Vila (1931-2009).

The exhibition *Montevideo* presents, for the first time, a significant set of key works by these four fundamental artists, all from this period of upheaval.

Teresa Vila is a special case, since she yet to receive the deep study her work warrants and the attention of contemporary historians of Latin American conceptualism.

Vila received a traditional training in the School of Fine Arts, in drawing and painting and in printmaking techniques, and began to show in the late '50s, distinguishing herself in the abstraction of *informalismo*, in a scene dominated by men. In the mid-'60s she incorporated into her painting the theme of war, with specific reference to the current one in Vietnam. Yet it would be by integrating her interests in literature and theater that the artist would break the logic of her conventional output. In 1962 she started to conceive events she called *Acciones con tema* [Actions on a Theme], which she was to develop over the latter half of the '60s and the start of the '70s. The first such action, called *Ambiente temático* [Thematic Milieu], was staged at the Club de Teatro in July of 1966. In it, the audience was invited, through various instructions written on paper and handed out to them, to conduct various actions such as reciting texts or eating food.



Teresa Vila. *Las veredas de la Patria Chica*, 1969-1971. Lithography on paper. 38,5 x 29,5 cm. Edition of 100

The set of seven works called *Las veredas de la Patria Chica* [The Sidewalks of the Little Homeland] synthesized, in a setting of social and political degradation, the artist's interest in historical and political processes. The founding past of the small country (Uruguay) is evoked by the artist in an extremely original visual construct, combining fragments of

national emblems, text, and copies of the traditional sidewalks of Montevideo.

The exhibition *Montevideo* presents the portfolio of seven lithographs that make up this work, with a preparatory sketch made in 1969 in graphite on paper.

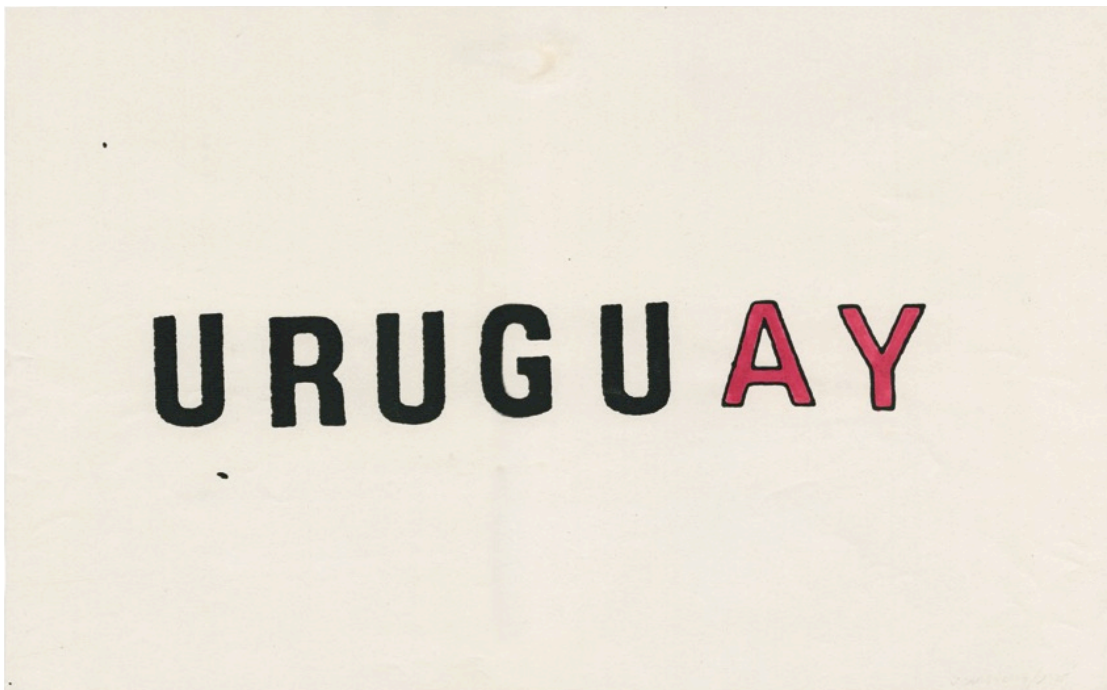
The career of **Clemente Padín** as a visual artist is thoroughly atypical in the context of Uruguayan art. Educated in literature, he founded and directed, with a group of young poets, the magazines *Los Huevos del Plata* [Eggs of the Plata] in 1965 and later, on his own, *OVUM 10*.



Clemente Padín. *Texto XIII*, 1968/1984. Black and White serigraphy on paper. 65 x 50 cm

In the latter half of the '60s, Padín built up a major network of contacts with other artists, notable among them: Dámaso Ogaz in Caracas, Guillermo Deisler in Santiago de Chile, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo in La Plata, with whom he exchanged publications. These exchanges had a strong impact on Padín, putting him in touch with a vast international circuit of creators associated with a number of different experimental practices.

In 1967 Padín began the series of works called *Texto* [Text] and in 1968 *Signografías* [Signographies], which were formal experiments in a non-semantic visual poetry. These works, like other practices of visual poetry made in the latter half of the '60s in the region, led to an extreme breakdown of the boundaries between the worlds of literature and the visual arts.



Jorge Caraballo. *Urugu(ay)*, 1973. Xerography and ink on paper. 22,5 x 36 cm

Jorge Caraballo was the precursor of kinetic and op-art in Uruguay and, from the beginning of the '70s on, a fundamental figure in South American in the practices of visual poetry and mail art. In addition, along with Haroldo González, he was a representative of systems art, *arte de sistemas*, in Uruguay, also taking part in activities abroad, in the CAyC in Buenos Aires, and elsewhere.

After spending three years in Paris, where he participated in the seventh Paris Biennial, Caraballo met Clemente Padín in Montevideo, and entered into a decade of intense interchange with him.

The exhibition presents a significant grouping of works from this period, related to the practices of visual poetry, such as Padín's *Texto* and *Signografías*, and Caraballo's *Urugu(ay)*, *Constitución* and *SOS*. It also includes works belonging to *arte de sistemas*, such as *Desinformación*

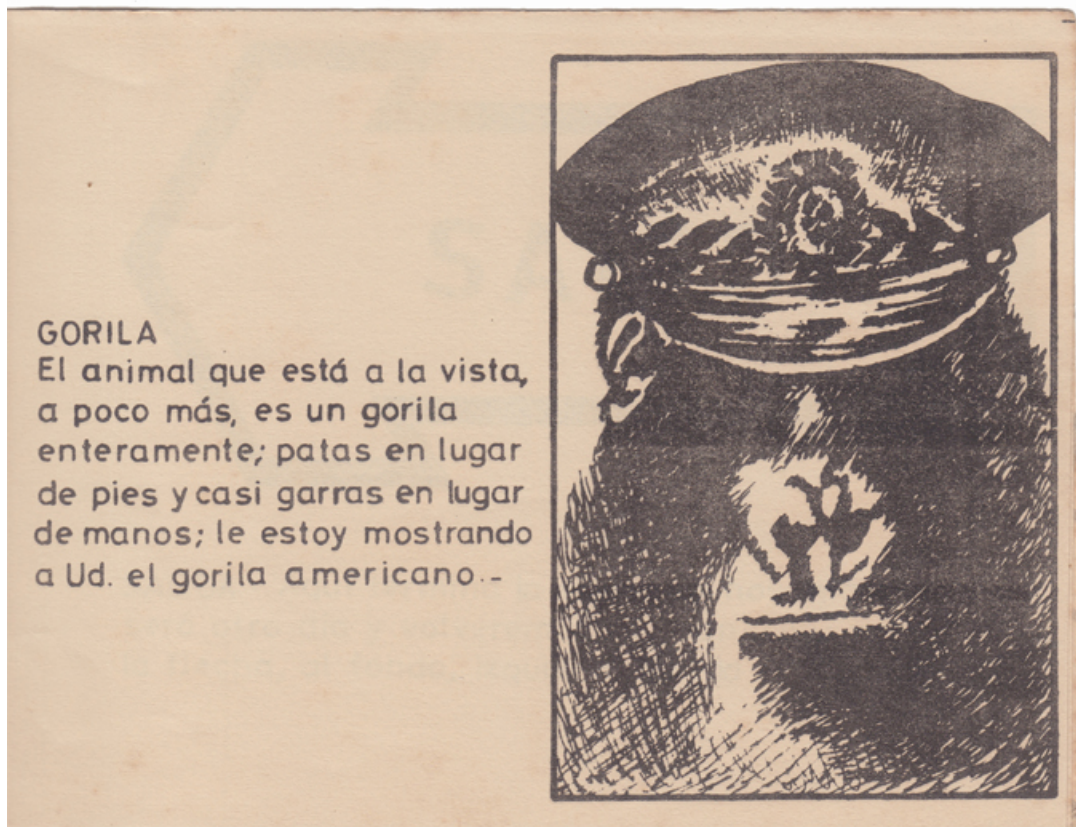
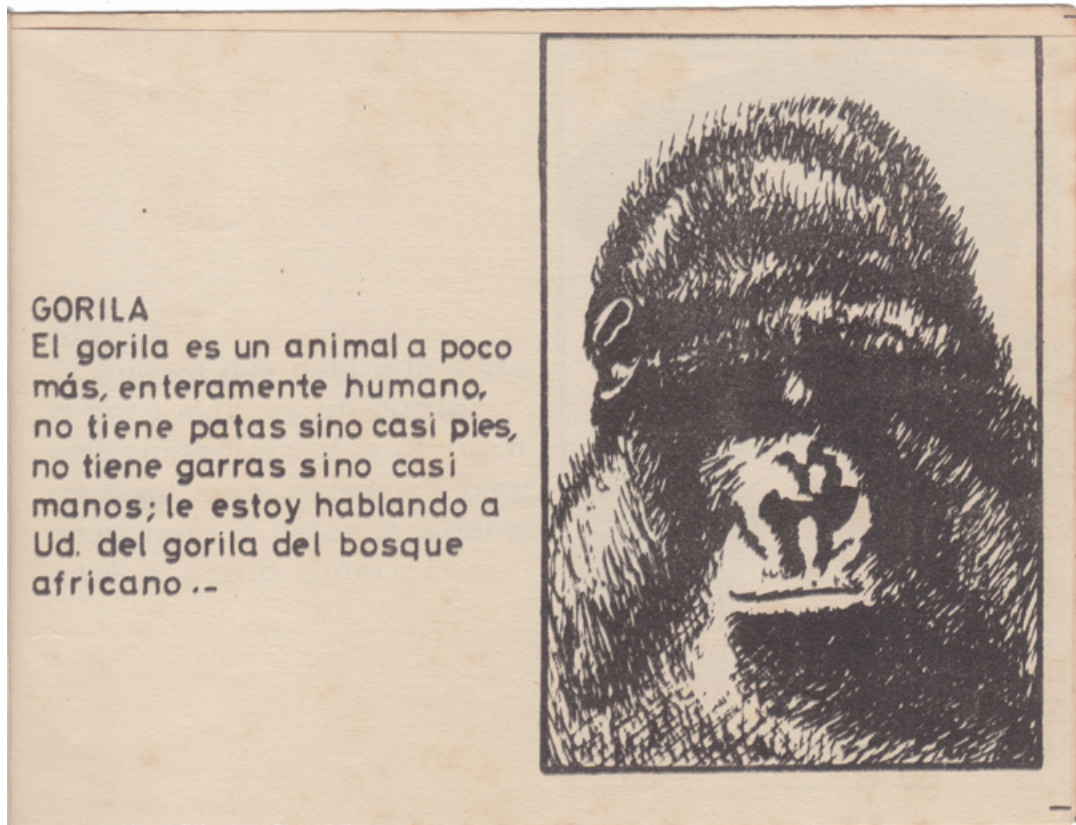
[Disinformation], *La palabra paz* [The Word Peace] or Caraballo's *Anteproyecto para abolir cinco calles* [Blueprint for Abolishing Five Streets] and experiments like Padín's *Tema y variaciones* and *Por el arte y por la Paz* [For Art and for Peace].

Finally, the show presents two key works by **Haroldo González**: *Dibujo en 5 lecciones* [Drawing in 5 Lessons], from 1972 and *El gran zoo* [The Big Zoo], from 1973. The works González made in the latter half of the '60s combine painting with drawing and collage, and in some cases included texts, in clear reference both to the political photo-collage of John Heartfield or Joseph Renau and to Anglo-Saxon pop art. *Dibujo en 5 lecciones* and *El gran zoo* are outcomes of an interest in using written language and with it in the possibilities of generating a space for the participation of the public, which, through its active intervention, could spark reflections on the place of the creator in society, on authorship, and the aura of the artwork. Performance and pedagogy are thus transformed into tools of reflection on the state of art and culture in relation to the individual's freedom.

This period came to a dramatic halt in the mid-'70s, with the full establishment of a military government. Teresa Vila gradually had to withdraw from public activity; Clemente Padín and Jorge Caraballo were arrested and imprisoned, accused of "*ridicule and contempt of the morale of the Armed Forces*"; Haroldo González went into exile in South Africa.

Manuel Neves

Manuel Neves is a freelance curator and historian, specializing in Latin American art. He graduated with distinction in the theory and practice of arts and language from the EHESS (School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences), Paris, France. He has organized curatorial projects and written introductions to exhibitions internationally. He is the author of three monographs on Uruguayan art and one on Brazilian art.



Haroldo González. *El gran zoo*, 1973. Print on paper. 10,5 x 15 cm c/u